



# FEMA

## Wild Fire Home Sprinklers

**Cook County, MN** - The Sierakowskis had a dream: to live along the Gunflint Trail in Grand Marais, Minnesota. They honeymooned at Gunflint Lodge, and after a lifetime of work in the St. Paul area, they were able to retire and build their dream log home along the quiet shores of Gull Lake.

On July 4, 1999, the surrounding area was hit with 70-100 mph winds that toppled 40 million trees. They knew that for the next decade, the Gunflint Trail Corridor was at risk for increased wild fire activity.

George Carlson, the Gunflint Trail Volunteer Fire Department Assistant Chief, also realized the implications of the Gunflint Trail Corridor's remote location coupled with the incredible fuel loads and knew some mitigation had to be done to prevent total devastation from the potential wild fire activity. He began researching the use of permanent sprinkler systems on structures and presented his findings to the community.

The Cook County Board of Commissioners applied to the State of Minnesota and Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) funding for the sprinkler project. Soon the Sierakowskis received a letter from the County stating that HMGP funds would pay 75 percent of the cost of installation but they were responsible for the remaining 25 percent. Corrine knew they had to protect their dream house and their property.

As part of the approval process for installation, they submitted a plan for the sprinkler system, including the pump location, sprinkler head locations, distance to the house, other building locations, and a diagram of the property. It only took a couple of days to install the system, which they ran afterward to assure proper installation, and it worked great.

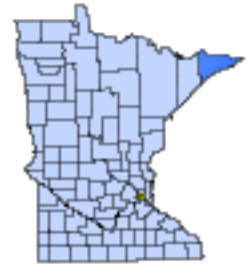
During the 2005 Alpine Lake Fire, they saw first hand the importance of maintenance. They ran their system purely as a precautionary measure during that fire, but realized one corner of the house was not getting soaked from the sprinklers. As a result, they added one more sprinkler head to cover that section of the house.

On Saturday, May 5, 2007, the fire started about ten miles away. Once they heard, Joe started running the sprinklers on gas as a precautionary measure.

Sunday afternoon they were notified there would be an evacuation order in effect soon and to begin to get ready to leave. The Sierakowskis were told they would be evacuating later in the afternoon, but a shift in the fire path quickly changed that. They only had time to grab the essentials while the Fire Department fire fighters switched their pump to propane.

They left their house in a four vehicle caravan down the Gunflint Trail. Joe describes the drive by saying "I don't have to wonder what Hell is like; I've been through it." As they were driving in the caravan along the Gunflint Trail, there was fire on both sides of the road.

After waiting anxiously, property owners were finally allowed to visit their home for 20 minutes on Tuesday. When they arrived the sprinklers were still going, although two heads had stopped working. In the end, the sprinkler system provided the protection needed to save their dream home. The Sierakowskis said "This fire is a good testimony that these systems really work!"



Cook County,  
Minnesota



### Quick Facts

Year:

**1999**

Sector:

**Public/Private Partnership**

Cost:

**Amount Not Available**

Primary Activity/Project:

**Retrofitting, Non-structural**

Primary Funding:

**Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)**